

THE  
*Egyptian, Syrian,  
AND  
Iraqi Revolutions*

*Some Observations on Their Underlying Causes  
and Social Character*

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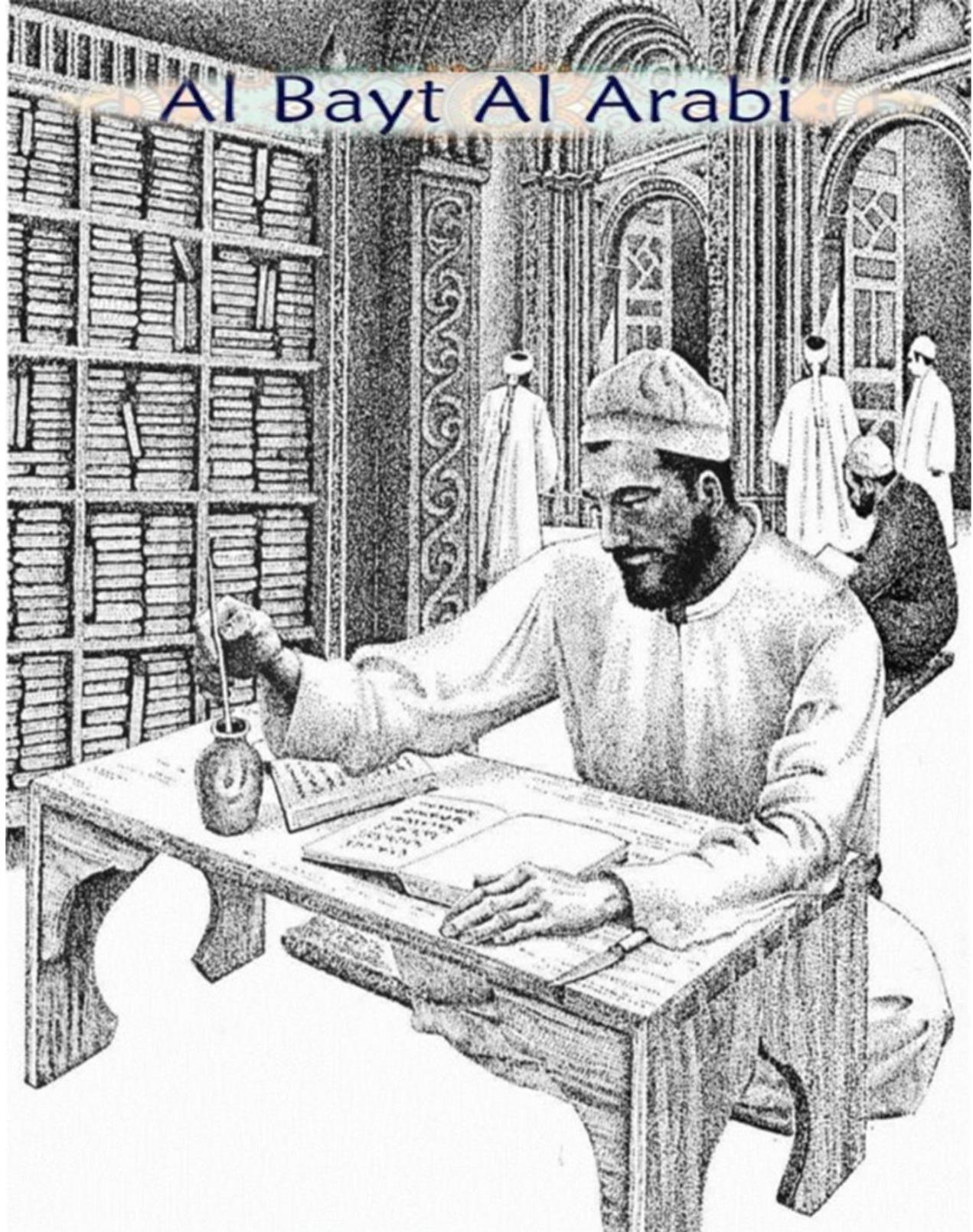


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*The Egyptian, Syrian, and Iraqi Revolutions:  
Some Observations on  
Their Underlying Causes and Social Character*

There are great gaps in our knowledge of the social origins and social outcomes of Arab revolutions. Surprisingly enough, there is not a single systematic in-depth study of the social roots or relationships of the 200 or so Free Officers who carried out the 1952 coup in Egypt. Similarly, relatively little is known about the families of Syria's and Iraq's rulers and the significance of these families as units of political and economic interaction. Intelligible data that could shed light on qualitative changes in the basic relationships of society are not easy to obtain, particularly in the case of Iraq and Syria, and such relevant statistics as are published are not infrequently of doubtful accuracy, not detailed enough to permit meaningful inferences, or lend themselves to conflicting interpretations. Inevitably, the analysis offered here proceeds, at least at some points, from impressions rather than from hard facts and leads to conclusions that can only be tentative.

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*THE CAUSATIVE FACTORS* underlying Arab revolutionary outbreaks are, to be sure, multiple and complicated and some of them arise out of the unique internal

or external conditions of different Arab countries. At the same time, the Arab revolutions have a common causal context. They are all directly, or through manifold and intricate mediate causes, related to a crucial historical process: the gradual tying-up of the Arab people in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to an international market resting on large-scale industry and their involvement in the web of forces or the consequences of forces unleashed by the industrial and technological revolutions.

To this process, which is still at work, is related in one way or another a series of large facts: among others, the advance in the Arab world of the West's power and capital; the incipient imitation of modern techniques; the diffusion of elements of Western culture; the improvement of health standards and the swift rise in the rates of population growth; the British, French, and Italian conquests; the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire and the severance of several of its Arab provinces from their natural trading regions; the settlement of French, Spanish, and Italian *colonies* in Algeria, Morocco, and Libya, and of European and Oriental Jews in Palestine; the setting up of dependent monarchies, republics, and shaykhdoms with new standing armies and new administrative machines; the exploitation of the region's oil resources and the sudden explosion in the Arabian Peninsula of the "epidemic of oil money."

The ensuing structural consequences have been far-reaching. Old local economies based on the handicraft, pearl-diving, or boat-building industries and the traditional means of transport (camels and sailing ships)

declined or broke asunder. A tillage essentially localized, based on bare subsistence, or subordinate to pastoralism gave way to a settled, market-related agriculture or an agriculture heavily dependent on one cash crop (wine in Algeria, cotton in Egypt, sugar in the Sudan). Private property, which had been largely confined to towns, became wider in extent, stabilized, and extremely concentrated. Extensive tracts of state domain and communal tribal land passed into the hands of new men of capital, European *colonies*, ex-warring shaykhs, or retainers of ruling pashas, often through forced purchases or without ground of right or any payment whatever. A handful of mercantile families rose to inordinate wealth by dint of the preferential patronage of princely elites with an exclusive hold over fabulous oil resources. Existing balances between sects, religious groups, and social forces were severely disturbed. Tribes, guilds, and mystic orders lost cohesion or disintegrated and the vital economic defenses which they provided for peasants and artisans weakened or vanished. Vast masses of people moved from the oil-poor to the oil-rich lands in search of income, or from the countryside to the big cities to enroll in the new armies, bureaucracies, and police forces, or to find employment in the businesses that supplied the needs of these institutions, or to swell the ranks of unskilled laborers and tangibly depress their earnings. Hundreds of thousands of peasants in Algeria and Palestine were uprooted from their homes and severed from their means of livelihood. Old ties, loyalties, and norms were, to a lesser or greater degree, undermined, eroded, or swept away.

In these structural changes all the important radical parties and movements, including the Muslim Brethren, the Communists, the Ba'ath, the Free Officers, the Arab Nationalists, the Algerian Fellaghas, and the Palestinian Fedayeen, had their roots. From the same sources flowed the insurrectionary trend which had its most powerful expressions in this century in the Egyptian revolutions of 1919 and 1952, the Iraqi revolutions of 1920 and 1958, the Syrian revolutions of 1925-27 and 1963, the Palestinian popular upheaval of 1936-39, the Algerian revolution of 1954-1962, the guerrilla risings of 1965-1974 in Dhofar, the Libyan revolution of 1969, and the civil wars of 1961-67 in North Yemen, of 1970 in Jordan, and of 1975-76 in Lebanon.

To the same structural changes are related in one way or another and by visible or invisible threads the Arab-Israeli wars of 1948-49, 1956, 1967, 1973, and 1982 and their widespread disruptive effects, particularly on the economies of Egypt and Syria, involving as they did enormous diversion of physical and human resources into defense.

To be more explicit, the recurring upheavals and conflicts in the Arab world reflect underlying structural discordances. They are also directly or in an ultimate sense conflicts between ethnic forces, religious groups, or economic classes that *suffered* and ethnic forces, religious groups, or economic classes—in and outside the Arab countries—that *benefited* from the processes just described. 

*I*N IRAQ the officer corps and the Ba'ath Party drew many of their restless elements from the northern Arab families who had moved to the capital and whose traditional economic life had been disorganized by the hindrances of the new frontiers with Syria and by the decline of such industries as the construction of sailing ships at Hīt or the production of *'abā'as* (woollen cloaks) in the town of 'Anāh and of *kalaks* (rafts of inflated skins) in the town of Takrīt.<sup>1</sup> Much of the mass backing of the Communists in Baghdād in the revolutionary years 1958-1963 came from the populace of the quarter of Bāb ash-Shaykh, the center of a once thriving manual textile industry,<sup>2</sup> and from the Shurūgis, who were tribal peasant migrants from the southern 'Amārah region whose mode of subsistence had been upset by the shift to a market-oriented economy, the intensification of their shaykhs' hold on the land, the unrestricted use by Baghdād's and Kūt's big landowners of irrigation pumps on the Tigris, and the consequent drying up of some of the river channels.<sup>3</sup> Far more interesting is the fact that no less than 32 percent of the membership of the Communist Central Committee in the same revolutionary years were descendants of *sādah* (claimants of descent from the Prophet Muhammad). These *sādah* were of moderate means and often simultaneously provincial *'ulamā'*. Of causal significance here was a decline in the material situation of the "men of religion," especially in the inferior ranks.<sup>4</sup> A consequence of this was that their sons fulfilled a role not unanalogous to that played in the nineteenth century by the sons of the lower clergy in the history of the Russian revolutionary intelligentsia.

In some of its aspects, at least in terms of its social origins, Iraq's revolution was a rural revolution, or a revolution of the small country towns and of partially urbanized forces of rural origin against Iraq's chief city and its governing class. All the effective leaders of the various phases of Iraq's revolution were by birth or by origin from small country towns: 'Abd-ul-Karīm Qāsim from Suwayrah, 'Abd-us-Salām 'Āref from Sumaychah, Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr and Ṣaddām Husayn from Takrīt. Moreover, 32 out of the 47 members of the Ba'th party commands in the period 1952-1970, 9 out of the 15 members of the Supreme Committee of the Free Officers in 1958, and 13 out of the 15 members of the Revolutionary Command Council in the years 1968-1977 had similar rural roots. An overwhelming majority of them stemmed from the rural middle or lower middle classes—from small or intermediate landed peasants, petty agricultural entrepreneurs, petty tradesmen, and the like.<sup>5</sup>

From this it should not be inferred that Iraq's revolution was, narrowly speaking, the product of a conscious initiative on the part of these rural classes, or that their class interests consciously permeated the regimes produced by the revolution, or that in the instance of each and every leading figure involved in the revolution or its related coups and countercoups there was a direct or conscious connection between his social origin and his political behavior. What can validly be maintained—and this is supported by the facts—is that the leading revolutionaries, being predominantly of similar background, tended, in some respects and often uncon-

sciously, to view life from similar standpoints and to tackle many problems in a similar manner. It is only in this sense that the class character of their regimes can be vindicated.

*THE RURAL ASPECT* of Iraq's revolution discussed above was a characteristic which it shared with the revolutions in Egypt and Syria and, incidentally, also those in Algeria and Libya.

The initiators of Algeria's revolution came from communes that were predominantly rural in character. Few of these people were advantaged but most were better off than the unlettered peasant masses. Some stemmed from families that had reportedly declined in wealth and status over the years. The inadequate data on the leaders of the *maquisards* or guerrillas, who were active in the interior of the country, and the leaders of the more professional units stationed in Morocco and Tunisia suggest that they were also largely of modest and rural origins.<sup>6</sup> Houari Boumedienne was the son of an impoverished wheat farmer from Clauzel, a village near Guelma in eastern Algeria.<sup>7</sup> The father of Ahmed Ben Bella, a peasant, could not eke out a livelihood from his stony and arid 30-hectare plot and, to supplement his income, had to practice petty trade in his native Marnia, a townlet in the district of Oran.<sup>8</sup>

Similarly, the principal leaders of the Libyan revolution originated for the most part from the bedouin-

rural segments of Libyan society and had their roots in the interior and oases rather than in the coastal cities.<sup>9</sup> Mu'ammar al-Qadhdhāfi was born in a tent in the open desert somewhere south of Sirt to a family of poor semi-nomads and 'Abd-us-Salām Jallūd to a humble family from a Fazzān oasis in Wādī-sh-Shattī.

Of the 12 members of Egypt's Revolutionary Command Council in 1952, at least 8 had rural origins and active rural connections, including Gamāl 'Abd-un-Nāṣir, Muḥammad Naguīb, and Anwar as-Sādāt. There is no definite information on the other four. Ahmad Ḥamrūsh, an army officer who took part in the military coup, maintains, on the basis of discussions he had with "all the officers who moved against the monarchy on the night of July 23," that none of them were descended from big landowners or from the poor peasant masses and that none of their fathers owned on the night of the coup more than 50 *feddāns*<sup>10</sup> (the *feddān* is roughly equal to an acre). This may perhaps explain why the ceiling on agricultural ownership did not fall below this limit in any of the stages of agrarian reform, even though it could have been lowered to 25 *feddāns* to the benefit of a larger number of landless families without detriment to Egypt's agricultural economy. At any rate, except for 'Abd-ul-Lāṭif al-Baghdādī, Zakariyyah and Khālid Muhyi-d-dīn, and the long-time Commander of the Armed Forces, 'Abd-ul-Hakīm 'Āmer, who were scions of affluent *'umdas* or village headmen, the members of the top revolutionary command stemmed from families of moderate means—government officials or small or middle peasants. Sādāt's father owned only two and a half

*feddāns* in the village of Mit Abūl Kūm<sup>11</sup> and Nāṣir's grandfather only about five *feddāns* in the village of Benī Murr.<sup>12</sup>

In the three or four decades before the revolution, peasant families with five or less than five *feddāns* were on the whole losing ground economically for a variety of reasons: among others, the fragmentation resulting from the Islamic law of inheritance, the vicissitudes of the price of cotton, the pressure on increasingly scarce land, and the recurrent insect attacks and soil deterioration arising out of the extension of perennial cultivation, the neglect of drainage, and the shift around the turn of the century by the small and middle peasants from the three to the two-year crop rotation.<sup>13</sup> 

*RURAL FORCES* were also significant in the Syrian revolution. The Ba'th regime of the revolutionary years 1963-1968 rested on an alliance within the army between varying groups which shared similar rural roots and similar rural orientations, and embraced 'Alawis from the province of Latakia, Druzes from Jabal al-'Arab, and Sunnis from the region of Hawrān and the district of Dayr az-Zūr and from different small country towns.<sup>14</sup>

The lot of the 'Alawis, who constituted the most numerous and poorest peasants in the plains to the west, south, and east of the 'Alawi mountains, was never enviable. Under the Ottomans they were abused, reviled,

and ground down by exactions and, on occasion, their women and children were led into captivity and disposed of by sale. Their situation worsened with the deepening commercialization of agriculture, and after World War I and in the period of the French Mandate became so deplorable that they developed the practice of selling or hiring out their daughters to affluent townspeople. These conditions drove them to enroll in great numbers in the state's armed forces, which in turn facilitated their rise to the political dominance that they now enjoy. This finds its epitome in the career of Hāfiẓ al-Asad, who reached the summit of power by dint of his membership in the Ba'thist Secret Military Committee (founded in 1959) and his eventual control through this committee of the Military Section of the Ba'th Party and of the striking units of Syria's armed forces, but who began life as the son of a peasant who had difficulty making a living from the small plot he owned in the village of Qardāḥah.

The Ba'thist Druze officers were also from an economically disadvantaged rural region, but there was an additional cause for their insurrectionary inclinations. Protected by difficult terrain, the sect to which they belonged had long enjoyed a *de facto* autonomy but lost it in recent decades in the wake of improvements in the means of communications and a decisive increase in the firepower of the central government.

The Hawrāni Ba'thists were sons of small farmers. The latter, like the other small farmers of Hawrān, sold their produce in markets controlled by the merchants of Damascus, who often succeeded in bending the state machine to their wishes and were, therefore, able to set

the conditions of trade in manners answering to their interests. Their relationship with the Hawrānis became in essence that of creditors with debtors.

As the merchants of Damascus dominated Hawrān, so did the men of capital in Aleppo dominate Dayr az-Zūr. But here there was also a tribal division at work. The traditional leaders of the district of Dayr az-Zūr stemmed from the Albū Sarāya, a section of the affluent Baggāra tribe, whereas many of the Ba'thists were descended from such inferior and underprivileged clans as the Khorshān and Shuyūkh.

This, incidentally, is not unlike the situation in Libya where the tribal factor was important. Mu'ammār al-Qadhdhāfi and his revolutionary companions, who abolished the tribes as political institutions, came with few exceptions from Libya's minor and depressed tribes. The superior tribes had identified themselves with the monarchy.<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, in Iraq, even though the Ba'th regime has consciously worked to weaken the country's tribal structure and to undermine the clan as a unit of social control, the revolution signified in certain of its aspects the decline of such major tribes as Shammar and Rabī'ah and the rise in the weight of such inferior clans as aj-Jumaylah and Albū Nāṣir. The Jumaylah tribesmen formed the backbone of the key military unit shielding the regime of their kinsmen, 'Abd-us-Salām and 'Abd-ur-Rahmān 'Āref, in the period 1963-1968.<sup>16</sup> The Albū Nāṣir serve a similar function in the present-day regime of Saddām Husayn. Saddām himself, Minister of Defense 'Adnān al-Khayrallah at-Tulfāh, Chief of General Intelli-

gence Barzān Ibrāhīm,\* Director of Security Fādel al-Barāk, Deputy Director General of Security Wātbān Ibrāhīm,\* and Secretary General of the Office of the Ba'th Party Secretariat 'Alī Hasan al-Mājid, among others, belong to the tribe of Albū Nāṣir. According to the regime's adversaries, key members of the presidential bodyguard and of the Republican Guard, a crucial military unit, also stem from this tribe.

*DID THE REVOLUTIONS CHANGE* the face of society in Egypt, Iraq, and Syria? How profound or qualitative were these changes?

One of the most significant effects of the revolutions in all three countries was the enormous growth of the role of the government in the life of the people. The impact of the state upon the social structure or at least its capacity to determine the direction of social change was enhanced by its planning powers and its greater influence over the distribution of the national income. Related to this was the increase of its functions on most economic and social fronts—in banking, large-scale industry, cooperative agriculture, health, welfare, housing, and education. Under Sādāt the “*infitāh*” or “open-door” policy—in practice a kind of economic Thermidor—led

\*In October 1983 Barzān Ibrāhīm and Wātbān Ibrāhīm lost their positions. The post of Chief of General Intelligence went to Hishām al-Fakhri, ex-Commander of the Fourth Army Corps who, however, assumed command in February 1984 of the military operations against Iran east of the Tigris River.

to a certain reversal of this trend in Egypt. The intensity of the government's control over the economy decreased. The public sector was enfeebled through its partial deprivation of needed skills and resources, the impairment of its planning and coordinating capacities, the dismantling of some state enterprises, the import of goods analogous to goods manufactured by state factories, and the encouragement of a parasitic class of *nouveaux riches* (the “*uṭat smān*” or “fat cats”). Nevertheless, the state continues to be the main producer of industrial goods and the main employer of non-agricultural labor.<sup>17</sup>

The increased tasks of the government in the post-revolutionary period involved a big buildup in its staff and bureaus. In Egypt, state employees grew from an estimated 20,000 in 1882 to roughly 325,000 on the eve of the 1952 coup and to about 2.9 million in 1976.<sup>18</sup> In Syria they increased from 34,000 in 1960 to 331,000 in 1979<sup>19</sup> and in Iraq from about 85,000 in 1958 to 662,000 in 1978.<sup>20</sup> The post-revolutionary figures include employees and laborers in the public economic sector. When members of the armed and security forces, pensioners, and dependents of the soldiers and other state servants are considered, it becomes clear that in all three countries more than one-fourth of the inhabitants depend directly upon the government for their livelihood and life chances.

The growth of government was in some measure politically induced and economically irrational, in the sense that a very considerable number of people were engaged by the state as part of efforts to reduce un-

employment (as in Egypt) or to recompense followers or ward off opposition (as in Syria and Iraq) and thus are superfluous and purely parasitic and, in effect, hamper the functioning of the administrative machine. To some degree, big government is the result of past nationalization measures and the uprooting of the social power of private large-scale property. At the same time, present international economic relationships are so structured, the financial, organizational, and technical powers of multinational corporations are so overwhelming, and the Arab world is so underdeveloped that, with some exceptions, Arab private entrepreneurs cannot grow autonomously and can only exist as appendages of either the multinational corporate system or of their own governments. This largely accounts for the fact that the tendency toward state dominance of the economy and the related trend toward big government are as characteristic of the traditionally oriented as of the radical or quasi-radical Arab countries.

The huge increase in the size and role of government—conjoined with other influences, such as the rapid rate of population growth and in Iraq the relatively depressed level of agriculture—led to an accentuated and unhealthy rise in urban population. Damascus grew from 276,000 in 1942 to 530,000 in 1960 and 1.2 million in 1983;<sup>21</sup> Baghdād from about 150,000 in 1908 to 793,000 in 1957 and 3 million in 1983;<sup>22</sup> Cairo from 375,000 in 1882 to 2.3 million in 1952 and about 14 million today.<sup>23</sup> The problems and tensions generated by such unusually rapid changes can be imagined.

Another consequence of the growth of govern-

ment has been an appreciable rise in the numerical importance of the urban middle classes at least in Iraq and Syria and possibly in Egypt. This has been reinforced by the widening of educational opportunities. Although the available figures are incomplete or not sufficiently precise, it appears that in Iraq in the first revolutionary decade alone there was a two-fold increase of middle class townsmen (petty tradesmen, artisans, professionals, state employees, and employees of private firms in the middle and lower middle income brackets), and that their proportion of the urban inhabitants as a whole went up to something like 34 percent from the 28 percent or so at the time of the revolution.<sup>24</sup> Middle class townsmen nearly doubled in Syria between 1960 and 1970 and increased from 27.5 percent to 30.7 percent of the economically active population in the same decade.<sup>25</sup> In Egypt, according to one estimate, they added up to 59 percent of the total urban population in 1970-71,<sup>26</sup> but this figure is possibly inflated.

Interestingly enough, whereas in Syria the traditional urban “petty bourgeoisie”—the self-employed artisans and independent shopkeepers—grew in the decade in question (it increased from 12.5 percent to 14.7 percent of the economically active population),<sup>27</sup> in Egypt it was said to have “steadily lost its historical importance”<sup>28</sup> and in 1970-71 made up only about 5.2 percent of the active population, if one assumes the accuracy of the statistical evidence.<sup>29</sup> The growth of the “petty bourgeoisie” in Syria in the 1960s appears to have been the result of the mechanization of many of the small private firms and the ensuing decrease in their work

force which drove the more enterprising of their former laborers to establish businesses for themselves.

Impressionistic evidence strongly suggests that the bulk of the rising component of the middle class in the bureaucracy and the public sector, at least in Iraq and Syria, is of relatively recent rural origin. Indeed, in Syria, at the bottom of the discontent of the urban traders in the 1970s and the sympathy which segments of them developed for the Muslim Brethren is the fact that they frequently found themselves compelled to deal with state employees who were of rural origin and, if not hostile to the urban trading community, had little understanding of the intricacies of trade and thus wittingly or unwittingly raised all sorts of impediments in its path.

At any rate, until the retreat from radicalism, which in Egypt was carried out under the banner of the "*infītāb*" but which in Syria and Iraq proceeded more subtly, the upper and well-connected layers of the salaried middle class and more particularly their military segments appear to have been the main urban beneficiaries of the revolution.<sup>30</sup>

At the same time, the ranks of the industrial workers increased considerably, but not enough to render them important in a political sense. In Egypt's modern manufacturing sector they added up to only 250,000 in 1952 but to as many as 517,000 in 1966-67; their share of the national labor force rose from 3.5 percent to 6.1 percent in the same period.<sup>31</sup> In Iraq their numbers and those of administrative employees in large manufacturing plants (that is, plants with more than 10 workers) increased from 67,000 in 1960 to 92,000 in 1970 and to

151,000 in 1978.<sup>32</sup> In Syria the number of industrial workers in all (including small-scale) plants rose from 86,000 in 1960 to 242,000 in 1979.<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, in Egypt, in striking contrast to the continued privation of the floating, economically un-integrated sub-proletariat (the casual laborers, servants, street vendors, and the like) the bulk of the industrial workers were better remunerated and better cushioned monetarily against sickness and unemployment in the time of Nāṣir than under the monarchy. Thus, in the modern industrial sector their average annual income rose from 88 Egyptian pounds in 1952 to 168 Egyptian pounds in 1966-67. If due account is taken of the rise in the cost of living, the increase in their average real income appears to have been around 44 percent, but this does not include the workers' fringe benefits and the employers' contribution to social insurance.<sup>34</sup> In Iraq, according to published official figures, which do not distinguish between the wages of production workers and the salaries of administrative personnel, the average annual income (excluding social benefits) of persons employed in large industrial establishments rose from 231 *dīnārs* in 1960 to 317 *dīnārs* in 1970 and to 722 *dīnārs* in 1978.<sup>35</sup> From these increases must be eliminated the impact of inflation (at an average annual rate of 1.7 percent between 1960 and 1970 and of 14.1 percent between 1970 and 1980<sup>36</sup>). This suggests a real income increment of 16.1 percent in the first post-revolutionary decade and a real decline of 20.7 percent between 1970 and 1978. For Syria there are no readily comparable statistics except with regard to the years after Hāfiẓ al-

Asad's seizure of power; the average monthly wage of workers in the industrial public sector rose from 240 Syrian pounds in 1970 to 503 Syrian pounds in 1977.<sup>37</sup> Inasmuch as the average annual rate of inflation was 11.4 percent in the same period,<sup>38</sup> it appears that there was a real decrease in workers' income of 1.6 percent.

In the countryside, one partly unintended consequence of the Egyptian revolution was the rise in the importance of the rich peasants (that is, peasants owning more than 20 *feddāns*), thanks largely to their superior resources, their links with local officials, their "ingenious" exploitation of rural cooperatives, and their ready access to agricultural credit. Their position has been further enhanced by the "*infitāh*" policies. Together with the middle peasants (that is, peasants owning 5 to 20 *feddāns*), they now control about 62 percent of Egypt's cultivated area and as much as 80 to 90 percent of the stock of farm machinery.<sup>39</sup> In Syria the state did not favor the rich peasants in the second half of the 1960s but heavily emphasized collectivization. After 1970, however, it winked at illegal purchases or leasing by the richer peasants of plots owned by the poorer peasants and gave *de facto* support to "modern agriculturists" or capitalist farmers.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, in Iraq there was a considerable interest in the 1970s in organizing collective and state farms but during 1980 the government began turning over agricultural and agro-industrial projects to private investors under a law permitting them a 20 percent share in these projects, with 29 percent going to agricultural cooperatives and the state retaining 51 percent.<sup>41</sup>

All three revolutions expanded the small land-

holding peasantry and generally improved its conditions. In Egypt only 17.5 percent of the total agricultural income accrued to holders of less than five *feddāns* in 1950 but in 1965 their share was 34 percent.<sup>42</sup> A very rough estimate indicates that in Syria holders of 1 to 10 hectares controlled only 15 percent of the agricultural land in 1950 but 35 percent in 1970. Their proportion of the population rose from 22 percent to 47.5 percent in the same period.<sup>43</sup> In Iraq the agrarian reform beneficiaries alone owned, at the end of 1978, 7.6 million *meshāras*<sup>44</sup> or 33.2 percent of Iraq's total cultivated area.

However, by the 1970s 33 percent of all rural families in Egypt remained landless but only 21 percent in Syria and less than 13 percent in Iraq.<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, the exodus from the countryside has been most intense in Iraq: in 1980 as much as 72 percent of Iraq's population was urban. The corresponding figure for Egypt was only 45 percent and for Syria 50 percent.<sup>46</sup> But Iraq's pronounced urban demographic growth reflects in part the recent migration to Baghdād and other cities of upward of 1 million Egyptian laborers.

It may be worthwhile to note parenthetically that, as is evident from the table below, only Syria succeeded in consistently raising its per capita agricultural production during the 1970s, probably by reason of the more flexible agricultural policy of its government and the serious attention it paid to rural cooperatives and the productivity of the peasants. Syria's relative success is also explicable by the increase of irrigated land in the wake of the development of the Euphrates Dam. In Egypt the *laissez-faire* bias of the "*infitāh*" is partly to blame

**AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION  
INDICES PER CAPITA  
1969-71 = 100**

	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980
Egypt	101	99	100	99	97	94	93	93	87	89	90	91
Iraq	103	99	97	121	88	85	77	94	85	84	84	88
Syria	116	89	95	126	79	126	124	140	127	143	129	148

Source: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations,  
*FAO Production Yearbook, 1981*, Volume 34, pp. 81-82.

for the widening gap between the demand for food and the domestic supply; since the death of Nāṣir in 1970 almost a sixth of the cultivated land has been lost to residential and commercial construction.<sup>47</sup> Inefficient farming methods, the spread of salinity, the import of cheap food, the wide income differentials between agricultural and industrial laborers, and the inadequate interest shown by the government in developing the peasants into skilled farmers account for the relative deterioration of agriculture in Iraq, which is now even more pronounced by dint of the withdrawal of 40 to 45 percent of the country's labor force from production for the direct or indirect purposes of the Iraq-Iran war.<sup>48</sup>

In all three countries the casual agricultural laborers have probably benefited least from the revolution. This is particularly true in Egypt, especially in the case of the migrant laboring class known as the *tarābil*, who now number at least 2 million. These are usually recruited for four to eight weeks for the maintenance of canals and other rural purposes. As a rule, they are abused both by their employers and by special labor contractors, the *muwakkilī anfār*, who extract commis-

sions from them that can add up to something like 12 percent of their earnings and to whom they are perpetually indebted. Their indebtedness has been generated by existential constraints that compel them to borrow from the labor contractors during the slack season and for such occasions as births, deaths, sickness, and marriage.<sup>49</sup> According to one source, however, changes in the conditions of labor supply after 1973, especially migration to the cities and to Iraq and the Gulf, led to "dramatic increases in rural real wage rates."<sup>50</sup> This is rather astonishing in light of the fact that 1 million Egyptians are born every 10 months and 400,000 persons enter the labor force annually. Anyhow, the recent economic slowdown and layoff of foreign workers in the Gulf is bound to affect adversely whatever gains Egypt's rural laborers may have achieved.

One final point: all three revolutions initially sought to reduce their countries' subordination to the Western economy and the international division of labor and to achieve a certain measure of economic independence. Egypt appears to have temporarily moved in that direction during part of the Nāṣir period and Iraq in the 1960s. Otherwise, and especially after the adoption of the *infitāḥ* or analogous policies, the external orientation of the economies of the three countries and their participation in the international division of labor progressed and deepened. The average annual growth rate of imports between 1960 and 1970 was -1.1 percent for Egypt, 4 percent for Syria, and 1.4 percent for Iraq, but between 1970 and 1980 it was 8.8 percent for Egypt, 13 percent for Syria, and 20.5 percent for Iraq.<sup>51</sup> For Egypt, the ratio

of imports to the gross domestic product declined from 28.7 percent in 1952-53 to 20.4 percent in 1959-60 and 10.2 percent in 1970 but rose to 21.1 percent in 1980. For Syria, the corresponding indicator was 10.3 percent in 1963, 19.8 percent in 1970, and 32 percent in 1980. For Iraq, it was 29 percent in 1958, 12.6 percent in 1970, and 29.3 percent in 1980.<sup>52</sup> As a matter of fact, as has been powerfully argued in a recent study by a well-known author,<sup>53</sup> the role of imports is now markedly more significant in the economies of the Arab region than in the economies of any other region of the Third World. However, an increase in imports need not in itself imply an increase of dependence. The real problem flows from the fact that the goods imported tend to be more of the kind that weaken rather than enhance the relative autonomy or productive capacity of the countries concerned.



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Consult Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1978), pp. 293-294 and 298; Tables 41-2, 41-3, and 41-4; pp. 995 and 998; Tables 58-2 and 58-3; and pp. 1088-1092.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 424 and 983 (the 'Aqd-ul-Akrād district is a part of Bāb ash-Shaykh).

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 134 ff., 150-151, 551, 804-805, 898, 978, and 983 (the Shurūgis lived in the town of ath-Thawrah in 1963).

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 999-1000.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 778-783, 1086-1089, and 1216-1223.

<sup>6</sup>William B. Quandt, *Revolution and Political Leadership: Algeria, 1954-1968* (The M.I.T. Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1969), pp. 69, 73, and 111.

<sup>7</sup>*The New York Times*, December 3, 1978; and David and Marina Ottaway, *Algeria: The Politics of a Socialist Revolution* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1970), p. 296.

<sup>8</sup>Robert Merle, *Ahmed Ben Bella* (Editions Gallimard, Paris, 1965), p. 23.

<sup>9</sup>Ruth First, *Libya: The Elusive Revolution* (Africana Publishing Company, New York, 1975), pp. 115-116.

<sup>10</sup>Ahmad Hamrūsh, *Qissat Thaurat Thalātbah wa 'Isbrīn Yūliyū* (The Story of the Revolution of July 23), Volume I: *Misr wa-l-'Askariyyūn* (Egypt and the Military) (The Arab Studies and Publishing Institute, Beirut, 1974), p. 214.

<sup>11</sup>Anwar as-Sādāt, *In Search of Identity: An Autobiography* (Harper & Row, New York, 1978), p. 3.

<sup>12</sup>Jean Lacouture, *Nasser*, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1971, p. 26.

<sup>13</sup>On the last point, see Alan Richards, "Agricultural Technology and Rural Social Classes in Egypt, 1920-1939," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Volume 16, Number 2, May 1980, pp. 56-83.

<sup>14</sup>The points discussed in this and the following paragraphs are developed further in Hanna Batatu, "Some Observations on the Social Roots of Syria's Ruling Military Group and the Causes for its Dominance," *The Middle East Journal*, Volume 35, Number 3, Summer 1981, pp. 331-344; and Hanna Batatu, "Syria's Muslim Brethren," *MERIP Reports*, Number 110, November-December 1982, pp. 12-20.

<sup>15</sup>Ruth First, *Libya: The Elusive Revolution*, p. 115.

<sup>16</sup>Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, pp. 1027-1028.

<sup>17</sup>For the effects of the *infitāh* policy in Egypt, consult 'Ādel Hu-sayn, *al-Iqtisād al-Miṣrī min al-Istiqlāl ila-t-Tahāyyah, 1974-1979* (The Egyptian Economy: From Independence to a Satellite Status, 1974-1979), Dār al-Wahdah, Beirut, 1981, Volume II, pp. 438-502; Mark N. Cooper, *The Transformation of Egypt* (The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1982), pp. 91-125; and Marie-Christine Aulas, "Sādāt's Egypt: A Balance Sheet," *MERIP Reports*, Number 107, July-August 1982, pp. 8-11 and 14.

<sup>18</sup>Morroe Berger, *Bureaucracy and Society in Modern Egypt* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1957), p. 31; Robert Mabro, *The Egyptian Economy, 1952-1972* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1974), p. 224; and J.S. Birks and C.A. Sinclair, *Arab Manpower: The Crisis of Development* (St. Martin's Press, New York, 1980), p. 226.

<sup>19</sup>Syrian Arab Republic, *at-Ti'dād al-'Ām li-s-Sukkān, 1960* (Population Census, 1960), p. 165; and *Statistical Abstract, 1980*, p. 143.

<sup>20</sup>Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, p. 1123; and Republic of Iraq, *Annual Abstract of Statistics, 1978*, p. 270.

<sup>21</sup>Great Britain, Naval Intelligence Division, *Syria* (London, 1943), p. 207; and Syrian Arab Republic, *Statistical Abstract, 1980*, pp. 80 and 133. The 1983 figure is partly estimated.

<sup>22</sup>Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq* p. 35. The 1983 figure is a rough estimate.

<sup>23</sup>For the 1882 figure, see Gabriel Baer, *Studies in the Social History of Egypt* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1969), p. 135. The 1952 figure is based on data in Janet Abu-Lughod, *Cairo* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1971), pp. 129-30. That for 1983 is based on a 1982 estimate by the U.S. Embassy in Cairo, *The New York Times*, June 1, 1982.

<sup>24</sup>Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, p. 1126.

<sup>25</sup>Elisabeth Longuenesse, "The Class Nature of the State in Syria: Contribution to An Analysis," *MERIP Reports*, Volume 9, Number 4, May 1979, p. 4.

<sup>26</sup>Mahmoud Abdel-Fadil, *The Political Economy of Nasserism* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, U.K., 1980), p. 95.

<sup>27</sup>See footnote #25.

<sup>28</sup>Mahmoud Abdel-Fadil, *The Political Economy of Nasserism*, p. 94.

<sup>29</sup>The percentage is based on the approximate figures provided in Mahmoud Abdel-Fadil, *The Political Economy of Nasserism*, p. 97, and on the assumption that the economically active population in Egypt in 1970-71 added up to roughly 8.3 million.

<sup>30</sup>This generalization is based partly on personal impressions and partly on Mahmoud Abdel-Fadil, *The Political Economy of Nasserism*, pp. 48-49, 52-53, 69, 88, and 105; Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, pp. 1127-1129 and 1133; and Syrian Arab Republic, *Statistical Abstract, 1980*, pp. 140-143.

<sup>31</sup>Robert Mabro, *The Egyptian Economy, 1952-1972*, p. 222.

<sup>32</sup>Republic of Iraq, *Statistical Handbook for the Years 1957-1967*, p. 86; *Annual Abstract of Statistics, 1973*, p. 169; and *Statistical Pocket Book, 1978*, p. 28.

<sup>33</sup>Syrian Arab Republic, *at-Ti'dād al-'Ām li-s-Sukkān, 1960*, p. 163; and *al-Qur' ul-'Arabi as-Sūri fi Arqām, 1980* (The Syrian Arab Republic in Figures, 1980), p. 4.

<sup>34</sup>Robert Mabro, *The Egyptian Economy, 1952-1972*, pp. 222-223.

<sup>35</sup>The amounts are computed from data in Republic of Iraq, *Statistical Handbook for the Years 1957-1967*, pp. 86-87; *Annual Abstract of Statistics*, 1973, p. 169; and *Statistical Pocket Book*, 1978, p. 28.

<sup>36</sup>The World Bank, *World Development Report 1982* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1982), p. 111.

<sup>37</sup>Computed from figures in Syrian Arab Republic, *Statistical Abstract*, 1980, p. 227.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 341.

<sup>39</sup>Mahmoud Abdel-Fadil, *Development, Income Distribution, and Social Change in Rural Egypt, 1952-1970* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge U.K., 1975), pp. 42-43, 117-118, and 121; and Raymond William Baker, *Egypt's Uncertain Revolution under Nasser and Sadat* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1978), pp. 205-217.

<sup>40</sup>Robert Springborg, "Ba'thism in Practice: Agriculture, Politics, and Political Culture in Syria and Iraq," unpublished paper, June 1979, p. 13; and Samir Amin, *Irak et Syrie, 1960-1980, du projet national à la transnationalisation* (Les Editions de Minuit, Paris, 1982), p. 28.

<sup>41</sup>*The Middle East* (London), January 1981, p. 48.

<sup>42</sup>Robert Mabro, *The Egyptian Economy 1952-1972*, p. 221.

<sup>43</sup>Raymond A. Hinnebusch, *Party and Peasant in Syria* (American University in Cairo, Cairo, 1979), p. 58.

<sup>44</sup>Republic of Iraq, *Statistical Pocket Book*, 1978, p. 22. A *meshâra* equals 0.618 acre.

<sup>45</sup>The figure for Egypt is for 1970 and is taken from Mahmoud Abdel-Fadil, *Development, Income Distribution, and Social Change in Rural Egypt, 1952-1970*, p. 44. The percentage for Syria is also for 1970 and is based on data in Syrian Arab Republic, *Statistical Abstract*, 1980, pp. 93 and 171; and that for Iraq is for 1971 and is computed from data in Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, p. 1117.

<sup>46</sup>The World Bank, *World Development Report 1982*, pp. 148-149.

<sup>47</sup>Roger Owen, "The Arab Economies in the 1970s," *MERIP Reports*, Number 100/101, October-December 1981, p. 9.

<sup>48</sup>The percentage mentioned in the text was provided by President Saddam Husayn in an interview with one of *Time*'s editors, *Time*, July 19, 1982, p. 46.

<sup>49</sup>Mahmoud Abdel-Fadil, *Development, Income Distribution, and Social Change in Rural Egypt, 1952-1970*, pp. 46-48.

<sup>50</sup>Alan Richards, "Peasant Differentiation and Politics in Contemporary Egypt," *Peasant Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 3, Spring 1982, pp. 145-148 and 159.

<sup>51</sup>The World Bank, *World Development Report 1982*, pp. 124-125.

<sup>52</sup>The percentages are taken or computed from Robert Mabro, *The Egyptian Economy, 1952-1972*, p. 177; A.A. Kubursi, *Arab Economic Prospects in the 1980s* (Institute for Palestine Studies, Beirut, 1980), pp. 22-23; Republic of Iraq, *Statistical Handbook for the Years 1957-1967*, pp. 162-163; Syrian Arab Republic, *Statistical Abstract*, 1980, pp. 287 and 566; and The World Bank, *World Development Report 1982*, pp. 114-115 and 124-125.

<sup>53</sup>Samir Amin, *The Arab Economy Today* (Zed Press, London, 1982).

### A NOTE ON THE AUTHOR

Hanna Batatu, the Shaykh Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah Professor of Contemporary Arab Studies, received his undergraduate degree from Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service in 1953. He obtained his Ph.D. in political science from Harvard University in 1960.

He was awarded the Georgetown University Gold Key and the W. Coleman Nevils Gold Medal upon graduating from Georgetown. Professor Batatu has had fellowships from Vienna University, the Social Science Research Council, Harvard University, and Princeton University. He was the recipient of a research grant in 1964 from the Center for International Studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. A professor of political studies at the American University of Beirut from 1962 to 1981, Professor Batatu also held the position of chairman of the Department of Political Studies and Public Administration at the university from 1979 to 1981. In the year before coming to Georgetown, he was the H.A.R. Gibb Fellow in Islamic Studies at Harvard University.

His major work, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, published in 1978 by Princeton University Press, is regarded by many scholars to be the most significant contribution to the study of Middle Eastern society and politics in many years. This

enormous study, the work of ten years of diligent research, is unmatched for its richness of detail and grasp of theory. Professor Batatu's commitment to history as a requisite for the analysis of social change combined with his rigorous and original application of a political economy approach has gained him the respect of a broad spectrum of social scientists and Middle East specialists. He has also made important contributions to many scholarly journals including *Arab Studies Quarterly*, *Peuples Méditerranéens*, *al-Thaqafa al-Jadida*, *MERIP Reports*, and *The Middle East Journal* as well as to books on such subjects as Islam and Communism, hierarchy and stratification in the Arab world, and the future of higher education in the Middle East.

Dr. Batatu's current research interests include social structure and political power in Syria and Saudi Arabia. 